

CULTIVATE CONNECTION

Difficult Conversation Planner

While preparation won't guarantee that a difficult conversation goes perfectly, it gives you a much greater chance for success. Use this planner to organize your thoughts and plan your approach. *(Please note that two copies of this planner are provided for your use.)*

Difficult conversation with (name or initials):	
Date:	
DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVE	
What's the single most important reason for having this conversation?	
How might the conversation benefit everyone involved?	
What is the outcome I want from the conversation?	
What is the one message I want the other person to be able to repeat back to me at the end of the conversation?	
CONSIDER ALL PERSPECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS	
What feelings or opinions do I have on the situation? And what, specifically, has led me to this viewpoint?	
What information might I be missing? What do I need to learn in this conversation?	
If I were to put myself in the shoes of the other person, how might I feel? Why?	
What information might the other person be missing?	
If an objective moderator were to step in, what might he or she conclude about the situation?	
PLAN YOUR CONVERSATION ROADMAP	
I will open the conversation in an honest, measured way by saying _____.	
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm concerned about XYZ and want to discuss it with you ... • I have some tough news to share ... • I'm curious about your perspective on XYZ and want to talk it over with you ... 	

<p>What are the main questions I want to ask and points I want to make?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you help me understand why this is happening? • What ideas do you have about how to improve this in the future? • When you say X, it makes me uncomfortable, because ... 	
<p>What, if anything, has the person done in the past to avoid, deflect, or deny this or other issues? How will I respond if it happens again?</p>	
<p>What is the best reaction I might get? And how will I respond?</p>	
<p>What is the worst reaction I might get? And how will I respond?</p>	
<p>I will close the conversation in a proactive way by saying _____.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Thanks for talking this through. It sounds like we're in agreement that you'll do X and I'll do Y." • "I'll send an email recapping what we've both agreed to, and then let's touch base again on DATE." 	
DON'T LET PREPARATION BECOME PROCRASTINATION	
<p>I commit to having this conversation by:</p>	

CHOOSE COURAGE

Respond to Bias with Confidence

RESTATE OR PARAPHRASE.

- “I think I heard you saying _____ [paraphrase their comments]. Is that correct?”

ASK FOR CLARIFICATION OR MORE INFORMATION.

- “Could you say more about what you mean by that?”
- “How have you come to think that?”

ACKNOWLEDGE THE FEELINGS BEHIND THE STATEMENT.

Express empathy and compassion.

- “It sounds like you’re really frustrated/nervous/angry...”
- “I can understand that you’re upset when you feel disrespected.”

SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT.

- “I know you didn’t realize this, but when you _____ [comment/behavior], it was hurtful/offensive because _____. Instead you could _____ [different language or behavior].”

SHARE YOUR OWN PROCESS.

- “I noticed that you _____ [comment/behavior]. I used to do/say that too, but then I learned _____.”

EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS.

- “When you _____ [comment/behavior], I felt _____ [feeling] and I would like you to _____.”

CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPE.

Give information, share your own experience, and/or offer alternative perspectives.

- “Actually, in my experience _____.”
- “I think that’s a stereotype. I’ve learned that _____.”
- “Another way to look at it is _____.”

APPEAL TO VALUES AND PRINCIPLES.

- “I know you really care about _____. Acting in this way really undermines those intentions.”

PROMOTE EMPATHY.

Ask how they would feel if someone said something like that about their group, or their friend/partner/child.

- “I know you don’t like the stereotypes about _____ [their group], how do you think he feels when he hears those things about his group?”
- “How would you feel if someone said that about/did that to your sister or girlfriend?”

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

PRETEND YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND.

As people try to explain their comments, they often realize how silly they sound.

- “I don’t get it...”
- “Why is that funny?”

POINT OUT WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON WITH THE OTHER PERSON.

- “I’m tired of hearing your Muslim jokes. Do you know he’s also studying _____ and likes to _____? You may want to talk with him about that. You actually have a lot in common.”

W.I.I.F.T. (WHAT’S IN IT FOR THEM).

Explain why diversity or that individual/group can be helpful/valuable.

- “I know you’re not comfortable with _____ but they can help us reach out to or better serve other groups on campus/in the community.”
- “In the real world, we’re going to have to work with all sorts of people, so might as well learn how to do it here.”

REMIND THEM OF THE RULES OR POLICIES.

- “That behavior is against our code of conduct and could really get you in trouble.”

CHOOSE COURAGE

Example Bias Statements and Actions

Talking about bias in action is important because words matter. Bias in the workplace can be used against women, older people, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, and people with disabilities or mental illness. Whether you're on the receiving end of bias, or you witness it happening to someone else, it can be challenging to address. It's tempting to ignore bias in action, but the buildup of these "everyday slights" has consequences on a victim's mental and physical health that cannot be overlooked. The best way we can make progress and create inclusion together, is to speak up and respond directly but respectfully—it's about helping each other grow. To help you do this, here are some sample statements and corresponding responses.

STATEMENT	WAYS TO RESPOND
"Ugh, I can't read. I'm totally dyslexic today."	"I have learned not to use that term anymore since I, myself am not dyslexic. I believe that statement might be offensive to someone with that disability." <i>(Acknowledge the feelings behind the statement)</i>
"Millennials are all looking for promotions they haven't earned."	"Could you say more about what you mean by that? How have you come to think that?" <i>(Ask for clarification)</i>
"I don't agree with your lifestyle as an LGBTQ+ person."	"Maybe we can get to know each other better. Once you get to know more about me, my hope is that we will find more things that connect us than not." <i>(Express your feelings)</i>
"They all look alike." (referring to Asian Americans)	"I have found that the various Asian cultures are very unique and different from each other, just as most racial and ethnic cultures are." <i>(Challenge the stereotype)</i>
"You're so articulate. You don't sound Black."	"I know you meant that as a compliment, but unfortunately that connects to a larger history of people being surprised that black people can speak so well." <i>(Separate intent from impact)</i>
"Why haven't you found a husband yet?"	"I have learned to love being alone with all of the freedom and creative time it's afforded me. Yes, meaningful companionship is essential, but your life shouldn't be any less valuable in the absence of a relationship." <i>(Express your feelings)</i>